

I. PUBLIC SAFETY CONCERNS

Of the residents who responded to the survey, 52% rated crime as their primary concern. Subsequent discussions with residents indicated a feeling of relative security, but had concerns about the potential for crime to impact their neighborhood. According to the Baltimore County Police Department's Scanning and Forecasting Unit, the Ralston Community has seen a decrease in violent crime but a slight increase in property crimes from 1995 to 1996.

Ralston Crime Statistics

<i>Violent Crime</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>	<i>1997 (first 9 mos.)</i>
Homicide	0	0	0
Rape	2	0	0
Robbery	1	1	0
Aggravated Assault	4	3	4
 <i>Property Crime</i>	 <i>1995</i>	 <i>1996</i>	 <i>1997 (first 9 mos.)</i>
Breaking and Entering	7	22	7
Theft	12	16	8
Motor Vehicle Theft	8	9	4
Arson	0	0	0

ISSUE 1

Due to a slight overall increase in minor crime, the Ralston Community views crime as their primary concern.

ACTION

- 1A Apply for a Crime Prevention Grant to organize a Citizens On Patrol Unit.
- 1B Post signs indicating an active Citizen On Patrol Unit.
- 1C Initiate discussions with the Precinct Commander to increase police presence in the community.
- 1D Conduct periodic meetings with police to review crime statistics and discuss crime reduction methods.
- 1E Consult with nearby businesses to consider joint crime-fighting techniques, including evaluation of effectiveness of police Business Patrol Initiative.

II. RENTAL PROPERTIES CONCERNS

The community survey indicated that a perceived proliferation of rental properties is the second most heightened concern among the residents. There is a perception by area homeowners that some renters are not as diligent as homeowners in the upkeep of their property. During a walking tour through the community, homeowners identified several rental properties that exhibited evidence of neglect, such as poorly maintained lawns, and lapses in exterior maintenance. Baltimore County does not require rental registration; therefore reliable statistics regarding rental are difficult to obtain. A review of Tax Assessment Records indicated that only a few property owners had a different mailing address than the property located in Ralston, suggesting relatively few rental properties.

ISSUE 2

In an effort to stabilize the Ralston Community, the County and Ralston residents must aggressively promote home ownership in Ralston.

ACTION

- 2A Develop a brochure to highlight the convenience, value, and advantages of owning a home in Ralston. These brochures should be distributed to Realtors and interested home buyers. Application for financial assistance in developing a community

association brochure may be submitted for consideration by the County Office of Community Conservation grant process.

- 2B Consider initiation of discussions with non-profit organizations promoting stable home-ownership, such as Comprehensive Housing Assistance Inc. (CHAI) or Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) in order to promote home ownership.
- 2C Prepare a community directory of residents to assist in compilation of rental housing, and work with landlords to identify problems and encourage Livability Code compliance.

III. TRAFFIC CONCERNS

The Ralston Community consists of local, non-arterial or collector/thoroughfare streets. However, residents have expressed concern regarding the existing "cut through" traffic from Reisterstown Road to Sudbrook Lane, and want to ensure that non-local traffic would not increase with the construction of DeRisio Lane. Residents noted that their children play in the streets of their community because there is no local playground. Residents acknowledge that existing traffic volumes are generally low in Ralston - a desirous situation to maintain.

An important issue for residents is to ensure that the construction of DeRisio Lane would not encourage further encroachment of commercial uses and traffic into their residential community. In response to this concern, the proposed DeRisio Lane was re-designed to include a well defined landscaped buffer to effectively screen residences from commercial uses, and to redirect southbound traffic away from residences located on Sherwood Avenue.

Landscaped Buffer.

The DeRisio Lane boundary should become a demarcation line distinguishing between the commercial and residential communities. The County should deny any commercial use west of DeRisio Lane. A permanent landscaped buffer shall be established and maintained to clarify this boundary, and to shield the residential community from commercial impact. (See Exhibits 4 a-f - landscape barrier prototype.)

Sherwood Avenue Curvature.

An important redesign in DeRisio Lane will ensure that southbound traffic can only turn toward Reisterstown Road. No DeRisio Lane southbound traffic, which terminates at Sherwood Avenue, will be able to turn westbound onto Sherwood Avenue. (See Exhibit 4 e - Sherwood Avenue curvature design.)

Proposed Changes in Traffic Route Direction.

The community identified streets that are most likely to accommodate non-local traffic. Through a series of meetings involving community representatives, the Traffic Engineering and Transportation Planning Division of the Department of Public Works, the Office of Community Conservation, the Office of Planning and the Second District County Council Office, a plan to redirect the flow of traffic was suggested. In addition to changing traffic patterns, traffic calming devices such as stop signs and chokers (narrowing roads) were considered to better control the speed and flow of traffic.

Traffic patterns may be redesigned to minimize the impact of non-local traffic using Ralston streets to get between Reisterstown Road and Sudbrook Lane. At the community input meeting, residents were advised of possible options for changes to traffic patterns. After discussion, residents voted to make no recommendations to change traffic patterns at this time. However, it was decided that six months after completion of the DeRisio Lane extension, a new traffic study should be conducted by the County, and after further review, the community would reconsider the various options originally proposed.

ISSUE 3

The Ralston Community is concerned about non-local traffic using Ralston streets to get from Reisterstown Road and Sudbrook Lane, and wants to ensure that the construction of DeRisio Lane will not result in the encroachment of commercial activity and increased non-local traffic in the residential community. DeRisio Lane was designed with a curvature at Sherwood Avenue to deter west bound traffic from entering Sherwood Avenue via DeRisio Lane.

ACTION

- 3A Evaluate traffic in the Ralston Community in the Spring of 1998 prior to construction of DeRisio Lane.
- 3B Reevaluate traffic in the Ralston Community six months after completion of the DeRisio Lane extension.
- 3C Present findings of traffic evaluations to community to determine if there is a need for changes to traffic patterns in Ralston.

IV. CODE ENFORCEMENT CONCERNS

Houses converted to apartments are an even greater concern to homeowners than single family rental dwellings. While residents believe that illegal apartments are prevalent in Ralston, relatively few complaints regarding illegal apartments have been reported to

Baltimore County's Code Enforcement Division of the Department of Permits and Development Management. Due to the nature of illegal apartments, Code Enforcement Officers are not likely to successfully identify and gain code compliance without the assistance of neighborhood residents. In 1997, only one alleged illegal apartment in Ralston was under investigation by the Code Enforcement Division.

In addition to apartments, other Code Enforcement violations were evident during a 1997 walking tour involving residents and county officials. Some residents were not aware of recently-enacted legislative remedies to ensure maintenance of properties. In 1995, Councilman Kamenetz introduced County Council Bill 181-95 (amending the Investment Properties Act), enacted by the County Council to require an investment property owner to maintain, replace or repair certain exterior features of rental or commercial properties. In addition, the County Council enacted Councilman Kamenetz's amendments to Council Bill 46-96 (An Act Concerning "The Livability Code") to extend the authority of Code Enforcement Officers to owner-occupied housing. These legislative enactments are significant changes designed to bolster the residential stability of neighborhoods.

ISSUE 4

Effective code enforcement requires the active participation and reporting of code enforcement violations to the County. Possible reasons for residents not reporting code enforcement violations include a lack of awareness of violations, or concern or fear if a complaint is made in an individual's name, that there would be retaliation on the part of the violator.

ACTION

- 4A Organize a community association Code Enforcement Committee to become more familiar with regulations.
- 4B Request Department of Permits and Development Management provide representative to talk to the community of about code enforcement procedures.
- 4C Establish education and reporting procedures for code enforcement.
- 4D In order to allow residents to maintain confidentiality, the Community Association's Code Enforcement Committee should accept anonymous complaints from Ralston residents and be the primary complainant to the County in Code Enforcement cases.

V. OPEN SPACE CONCERNS

Another key concern of the Ralston community is the lack of a neighborhood park. There is no public open space in the Ralston community. The Master Plan suggests that increased efforts should be made to acquire open space in all subdivisions in the urban areas. Existing Local Open Space in Pikesville (see Exhibit 6 - Map Of Open Space in the Pikesville Community) is located a considerable distance from the Ralston Community. In order for the Ralston Community to compete with newer subdivision for homeowners, it must offer amenities which improve the quality of life, contribute to the sense of community and add to the marketability of Ralston.

ISSUE 5

Ralston lacks adequate open space to meet the recreational needs of existing residents and to attract new homeowners.

ACTION

- 5A The community association should form a local neighborhood park committee to identify potential sites to be converted to a neighborhood park.
- 5B The committee should request the County Office of Community Conservation and the Department of Recreation and Parks to determine the feasibility of site acquisition of properties for use as a neighborhood park.
- 5C The community should devise a long term maintenance agreement to assure community commitment to assist in the maintenance of the neighborhood park in accordance with the Department of Recreation and Park's Community Assisted Maintenance of Parks program (CAMP).
- 5D Landscaping enhancements can be developed at the gateway entrances to the Ralston community, including placement of community Welcome signage and a community association bulletin board, to enhance the sense of community and provide logical gathering points.

VI. INFRASTRUCTURE CONCERNS

The Ralston Community, one of the more mature residential communities in Pikesville, has an aging infrastructure. Infrastructure is a collective term for describing sewer, water, transportation and storm drain systems. During the spring of 1997, County Councilman Kevin Kamenetz, the Directors of the Department of Public Works and the Office of Community Conservation, a representative of the Office of Planning and approximately 20 residents of the Ralston Community

walked through the community and identified various infrastructure concerns. The following infrastructure concerns were identified:

- Potholes in the roads
- Ruts in the roads
- Curbs in need of repairs
- Depression in the street (possibly caused by replacement of the water line)

As a Master Plan-designated Community Conservation Area, Ralston should receive special consideration for Capital Improvement Funds. The Master Plan indicates that a significant portion of the Capital Improvement Program should be dedicated to physical improvement in the older neighborhoods. These improvements will help restore community pride and foster civic involvement among the communities' current residents and favorably influence prospective home buyers' decisions to purchase homes within these neighborhoods.

A tour by County officials and community residents identified the issues as stated in Exhibit 7. Specific efforts are underway to resolve these identified issues.

ISSUE 6

The Ralston Community is in need of infrastructure improvements. New homeowners are attracted to a stabilized community. The condition of public improvements could discourage existing homeowners and potential home buyers from contributing toward the stabilization of Ralston.

ACTION

- 6A The community association should form an Infrastructure Committee.
- 6B The Association infrastructure committee should regularly evaluate, prioritize and introduce infrastructure improvement needs at the County's Planning Board Capital Improvement Program Community Input Meeting held in November of each year, as part of the County's annual budget process.
- 6C A plan should be established to consider the need for additional street lighting for Ralston streets. The association should contact Brenda Hinkles at 410-887-3716 to schedule a community meeting to examine the need for additional street lights. The Councilman can assist in this regard, including submission of street light petitions.

VII. ZONING & LAND USE CONCERNS

Zoning is an effective tool that may be used to control the distribution of non-residential activity in the Ralston Community. The vitality and appearance of the commercial corridor which borders

the Ralston Community is essential to the perception and the well-being of the residential community which surrounds it. The current zoning and land uses designated by the Master Plan are appropriate and should not be changed. The commercial zoning and uses are located along Reisterstown Road, a major thoroughfare. The businesses located along the commercial corridor provide retail, restaurant, and local oriented services used by Ralston residents and other consumers. The residential uses will be further separated from the commercial uses by the proposed DeRisio Lane and an additional landscaped buffer. (See Exhibits 8a and 8b - Zoning and land use map of Ralston within Pikesville.)

ISSUE 7

The existing zoning classifications discourage the spread of nonresidential uses into the residential neighborhoods. DeRisio Lane will provide a physical barrier between the commercial and the residential uses.

ACTION

- 7A Discourage commercial zoning west of DeRisio Lane. DeRisio Lane should be the demarcation line between residential and commercial land uses.
- 7B Do not support zoning requests which threaten the residential character of the neighborhood.
- 7C The Ralston community should develop a relationship with the Pikesville Chamber of Commerce to communicate their concerns to the business owners.
- 7D The Ralston community association should form a zoning/land use community to actively address zoning issues raised in the once-every-four year comprehensive rezoning process, as well as respond to out-of-cycle zoning requests initiated during the year.